

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: CRESENCIA PONCE, housewife

Cresencia Ponce, Visayan, was born in 1901 in the Philippines. As a single woman, she came to Hawaii in December, 1924 with an uncle, arriving when the strike was already in progress.

For a time, she lived on Kealia Plantation, but later joined her sister in the Kapaa strike camp where she met her husband, Pedro. They were married shortly after the strike ended.

Cresencia is a gifted herbalist and healer. She has helped many individuals throughout Kauai and Oahu. She and Pedro are parents of six children. They currently reside in Kapaa.

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Crescencia Ponce (CP)

November 1, 1978

Kapaa, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with Crescencia Ponce in Kapaa. The date is November 1, 1978. The interviewer is Ed Gerlock.

EG: This is Crescencia Ponce, the wife of Mr. (Pedro) Ponce. She was very anxious to talk before, when her husband was being interviewed. This is just kind of a general question about when she first arrived, the things that happened.

CP: When I arrived here in December of 1924, December 9, we were there in Kealia. I was still an unmarried woman.

EG: Who were your companions on the ship. Were they workmen going to the plantations?

CP: We were all sakadas, sugar workers. We were all headed for or destined to go to Ewa, Waipahu, and we were destined for Kealia.

EG: What do you mean, "destined?"

CP: Or assigned.

EG: Who was it up to, where you would be assigned? The people in Honolulu?

CP: No, it was up to the plantation bosses. The bosses of the plantations were the ones who accepted us, and assigned us.

EG: Still there in the Philippines were they doing that? Or was that just here in Hawaii?

CP: In here, in Hawaii, of course. You know, at the time of the strike, I went by, riding in the back of a truck. And I saw so many strikers. A large number of them. I pitied them because they were all living in these very poor shacks. When I looked at them, I said to myself, "Mary, most Holy Virgin, how bitter it must be for those people who have no work."

My uncle was working at that time. He had a wife, and I was staying there at their house. I was still an unmarried woman. After I was there for about one week, I began to accept laundry, to do laundry for other people. I was doing laundry for the workmen.

EG: In the strike camp?

CP: Yeah, that's where we were doing it; in the strike camp. I was doing that kind of laundry, and there was an awful lot of rain for a long period of time. Like for around a month. And then, the work was quite heavy, and I was saying to myself, "It's very difficult, very bitter to do this kind of work here. I think it would be better if I just went back to the Philippines."

But my uncle was saying to me, "It may be very difficult now, but just wait a little while. Things will improve."

At the same time, I was looking for my younger sister because it would be such a waste to have come here and not to have seen her. I wasn't able to go outside of the strike camp while I was doing laundry there. There were a lot of plantation police who were outside of the strike camp, watching the road.

EG: Were you then inside of the strike camp?

PP: (Pedro Ponce) Not inside the strike camp but inside the plantation.

CP: There inside of the plantation, there was a man who liked me very much. He was from Pampanga in the Philippines [the northern part of the Philippines, north of Manila]. His name was Abe. He was a big name. We couldn't understand one another. He was using Tagalog and I'm a Visayan. I said to him, "I really don't like you very much."

There was an interpreter that explained us to each other. He was a Visayan. So the interpreter said to me, "If you like him, why don't you just go on ahead."

But I said to him, "I really don't like this guy very much. I have to also think back about my own birth, my own situation in life. That if I can't understand the man that I'm going to marry, of what use is that?"

The interpreter himself was getting angry at me, because he was asking me why don't I agree to this man. Then they tricked me and took me to the movies. They said to me, "Ning will go to the movies." [Her name is Crescensia; her nickname is Nining. It's very common among Visayans; or for short, Ning.]

I said, "I don't want to go to the movies because I don't have any money."

The interpreter said, "No, no, this is going to be our treat. We'll pay for the ticket."

I asked permission from my uncle. I said, "Manong, I'll go to the movies." So I went to the movies. But I was really watching very carefully that there wouldn't be any kind of foolishness.

They said, "Don't be sad about this whole thing, because we're only going to see a movie." There I was, sitting in the middle, between the interpreter and Abe, the man from Pampanga. The Pampangan, Abe, he took off his jacket and he was trying to put it around me.

I said to him, "I don't like that. Why are you putting that jacket around me?" He said that it was cold. I said to him, "That doesn't make any difference."

The interpreter was pinching me on the buttocks. We began to fight. I said to him, "I don't like that. If you're going to be that way, when I get home I'm going to tell my uncle what you were doing. And I'll never go with you again. I'm really not going to go with you anymore."

The next day, in the morning, there was Abe again. Nine o'clock in the morning, and I was inside the house ironing clothes. He said to me, "Open the door." I wouldn't open the door because I was the only one in the house. He started kicking the door, and the next thing you know, the door was broken. He came in the house. I was thinking to myself, if he comes over and he grabs me, I'm going to hit him right in the head with this iron. He was speaking to me in Tagalog again. I didn't understand what he was talking about. I was answering him in Visayan and he didn't know what I was saying either.

I jumped out the window. I went to tell the plantation police. I reported it to the police, and then he just went back with the people who were out on strike at the plantation. The police were also asking me why don't I just agree to accept him. I said to this man Sanchez, with the plantation police, "I just don't want to have anything to do with him. We can't understand one another and I have no love for him."

The wife of Abe is still alive; she's still here. I was thinking to myself, it really was not our fate. Abe was really very sad.

I told my uncle, "I'm really going to look for my younger sister." I had heard that my sister was there in the strike camp. I was telling my uncle, "Maybe I'll just enter the strike camp to find my sister." It was the man who was courting me, this Abe, this Pampangan, who took me to the strike camp. He wasn't sure himself. When we were walking along he was saying that he wasn't sure whether he really loved me also. He was saying that my sister was there in the strike camp. Now, he told my sister that I was looking for



her. And so she sent someone to me. Now, the man who came, who was sent by my sister, is the man that I'm married to now.

The plantation police said to me, "There's someone who's looking for you."

I asked, "Where is he?" He didn't come inside the plantation. He was waiting for me outside the plantation, on the government road.

So I went with the police to the road. The man there on the road said, "I have been sent by your sister."

I looked at the picture I had of the husband of my sister, and I said to myself, "This is not the husband of my sister." So I asked him, "Who are you? I don't think you're the husband of my sister."

He answered, "Well, I'm living in the same house as your sister. And I'm also the godfather of her child, in baptism." In 1924, my sister gave birth. So I wouldn't go with him.

Then, it was a little bit later than that, that Abe--who was still trying to court me, because he wanted me very badly--took me to the strike camp with him. He himself could not enter inside of the strike camp because he was working in the plantation. He was not on strike himself.

Then, the man who is my husband now became the interpreter between Abe and myself. And finally, he was saying, "You know, maybe it's better if I only speak about my love for you, because I'm Visayan and you can understand me." When I looked at this man who's my husband now, it looked to me like he was a sickly person.

And my younger sister said to me, "If that man starts courting you, don't agree to him because he's a sickly person, and he won't be able to keep you alive." My sister didn't like that we got married.

So I said to myself, "Lord, if this is the man that fate has sent to me, then that's the way it must be. Even if I get a lot of money, if there's no love, it's useless." He loved me, and I loved him too. You see?

But I said to him, "Let's not get married right away because I'm still new here in Hawaii." You know, he waited for one year.

And then I was working in the cannery at that time. Then my fellow workers there in the cannery came up to me and they said, "Ning, there's three guys downstairs who are looking for you." And they were very excited because the three who were looking for me looked like cowboys. Girls were very much afraid at that time, of being cowboy-ed.

And I remembered what my mother said to me, back there in the Philippines, that, "You be very careful when you go to Hawaii,

because there's a lot of cowboys there, and they might take advantage of you." I was really afraid.

So one of my companions was telling, "Don't go out right away, because there are three cowboys outside there, looking for you. Be careful." When I went out there it was kaukau time. Twelve o'clock. That's what time everybody ate at the pineapple cannery. When I went out at 12 o'clock, my companion was with me. Her name is Bedelia.

When I went out there I saw him. The three men who were waiting out there were the cousins of my present husband. His name is Pedro, and for short I call him Pedring. I'm not sure if I can remember the three names. Dibrosio is one, and Pitong and Miyan; that's the three cousins. The three were really anxious that we get married and not wait too long. But I said to them, "Not now." At the time of the strike, there were a lot of people who were on strike, and they were trying very hard. There were a lot who were courting me, and I was really confused. So I finally said to myself, "Maybe I should just agree to what Pedring is asking." So when I agreed to him, we got married.

So when I got married, my sister was saying to me, "You should really look for a house." So we finally found a place in Kapaa. That was after the strike.

I tell you, the strike was really a bitter kind of time for us. It was pitiful. There were a lot of women there in the strike camp. Married and unmarried. Both men and women, married and unmarried.

I said to Pedring, "You know, we're going to have to look for some kind of work." Because we had just gotten married. We were there in....there were houses there and it was far from everything--from the store and church and everything--but there were three or four families living there. So we became the fifth family. One of the neighbors was saying, "Why are you staying there all alone in your house? Why don't you come over here and eat with us?" The neighbor's name is Licayo.

EG: What were you doing there inside of the strike camp? I mean, what was your situation? How did you keep busy?

CP: We were making rice cakes. And we were selling them inside of the strike camp. It's what kept us alive, was selling the rice cakes. Once a week, we would make the rice cakes. We were three women who were making it, and then we'd go around selling them.

EG: What were you talking about there, when you sat around, just talking at the strike camp?

CP: Oh, we were talking about how bitter the strike really was. And if I had known ahead of time that it was like this, I don't think I would have come to the strike. And then I used to cry a lot. The

only reason why I came here in the first place, was because of my sister.

EG: Were you very hopeful that you would win the strike?

CP: Yes, we were. We really had a big hope that we would win. But I tell you, it was really hard. There was a lot of trouble, problems that came from the plantations. Even the women were helping and watching and guarding. The time of the strike was really bitter.

EG: What did you feel about the Ilocanos who didn't join the strike?

CP: We had no Ilocanos there at that time. The other people were Tagalogs, who were there.

EG: Did the Tagalogs join in?

CP: Yes, they did. There were also Ilongos, but they're the same as Visayans, because we can understand one another. There were people from Leyte also, but they're also Visayan. People from Siquijor also. They were mixed.

EG: Where were you when you heard the news, that there had been some kind of fighting, war there in Hanapepe?

CP: We were there in the strike camp.

EG: What did you feel, or what did you think when you heard the news about Hanapepe?

CP: Oh, we were really very sad when we heard about what happened. But we were also being watched from the outside, so that we couldn't leave and go to Hanapepe to be of any help to them. So they brought in these big machine guns and they had them facing across the road at the strike camp. So we were saying among ourselves, "Hey, we better not do anything. We better not fight back, because there's a lot of machine guns. They shoot that machine gun, it's finished." Women were crying. Some were taken by the police and taken to the jail. The wives and the husbands were split apart. The husbands went into the jail. But that didn't happen with us. We were just left behind.

EG: But your brother-in-law was put in jail; how come?

CP: Because he was a striker.

EG: As far as you could see, did you see any guns that were inside of the strike camp?

PP: No, there weren't any. Didn't see any. The only thing we had were bolos.

EG: Isn't it true that there were people from Cebu who know how to make

guns? Was there anything like that in the strike camp?

CP: No, nothing like that at all. All we saw inside of there were the bolos that people had. Bolo knife.

EG: Weren't you talking among yourselves and saying, "Hey, if the police come crashing in here, how are we going to protect ourselves if we only have bolos?"

CP: Yeah, we were talking about that. But look what happened in Hanapepe, there were so many who died. The police were up there on the top of the hill, and the strikers were down below, and they just kept killing them. Shoot, shoot.

EG: We had heard that after the massacre there in Hanapepe, that the National Guard came in and they searched all the different camps of the strikers, looking for guns.

CP: Yes, that's right. They came into our camp also, and they searched. They examined all of the rooms that were there. We saw them, we were there. The only thing they found was the bolos. They didn't find any bullets either. Where would we get bullets from anyway? If they found guns, they would have taken that person away where they found the gun. But they didn't.

EG: How did you look at people who were like on the other side? For instance, the National Guard people?

CP: We didn't think anything about them, because if we had started anything with them, I know they would have just killed us straight.

EG: What did you feel towards them? Did you feel any kind of a hatred?

CP: No, not at all. The strikers just went back to what they were doing before. When they weren't able to get the \$2 a day that they were asking for, they just went back doing the same kind of work at the same salary. My husband and I didn't go back to the same plantation after the strike was over.

EG: What do you think the average person was thinking, who came over from the Philippines? That after a short time and making a little bit of money, he would go back to the Philippines; or was he thinking that "No, Hawaii's going to be a whole new thing, and I'm going to stay there?"

CP: There were some who really wanted to go back and did go back, and there were others who didn't. People became accustomed to living here. Because some people say that in Hawaii, life is not as difficult as it is back in the Philippines. There were others who went back to the Philippines, but just for vacation. And then came back to Hawaii again. Very rarely did somebody go to the Philippines and just stay there, without coming back again. It was the people who were single and had no great responsibilities who were

able to go back. And those would be the ones also who may have stayed back in the Philippines and didn't come back to Hawaii. Just like our komadre Lucio, who went back to the Philippines and didn't come back again.

EG: How would you compare being in the Philippines and being here, as far as possibilities for economic advancement?

CP: Well, a lot depends on what you had in the Philippines. If you did not own land in the Philippines, you really had a difficult time economically. Also, if you didn't have land and you were working for somebody else, both here and in the Philippines, there is a big difference in the salary that you receive. It'd be more here than there. In the Philippines before, you were getting about two pesos per day.

EG: When you signed the contract back there in the Philippines, to come here to Hawaii to work, what were the conditions of that contract?

CP: I don't know anything about that because it was the menfolk who were signing the contracts.

PP: We signed the contract back in the Philippines. If you worked in one plantation for three years, after that three year period is over, you can go back to the Philippines, and the transportation is free. There were some who fulfilled their contract and went back to the Philippines, and then came back again. There were others like myself who didn't go back anymore. Especially those who, like myself, had families, they just stayed here.

EG: How about if you worked on different plantations in the course of the three years? Could you still go back to the Philippines on that free trip back?

PP: Yes, you could. Because actually, the contract was signed with the overall board of the company.

END OF SIDE ONE

## SIDE TWO

PP: ...association of the sugar growers or plantation heads, and that's who you sign the contract with. And so even if you worked on different plantations, you could still go back. But it was still better if you just stayed with one plantation for the whole three years; it was quicker. You could go back a lot quicker. But as far as women are concerned, they had no contract themselves. They went with men. Only men had contracts.

EG: Was there any kind of a bonus that was given to workers at that time?

PP: Sometimes, at the end of one whole year's work, there was a bonus. But it was a very small amount. Sometimes it would be something like \$5, depending on the kind of work that you were doing. Sometimes it would go up to 10 pesos. The real big bonuses were for those individuals who had contracts with the companies to grow sugar for them. If I exceeded the quota that was set for me I'd receive a pretty big bonus. Sometimes it would be over \$1000.

EG: Was there any kind of a limit set by the plantations themselves about how many days you had to work in a month?

PP: Yeah, the general rule was, outside of Saturday and Sunday, if you had nothing wrong with your body, if you had no sickness, then you had to work. So we really tried to work as hard as we could. What made the work really difficult was we would start at 6 o'clock in the morning, and we would be coming home again, finishing work at 6 in the evening. The pay was 16 cents per hour.

At the time of the strike you were really not allowed to work at all. And we have been visited here by a counsel. This counsel came from Manila. He came from Manila and he was sent to us here in 1924. He was sent in order to talk to us and to fix up the situation of those of us who were on strike. All the Filipinos who were on strike.

EG: What was his name?

PP: Cayetano Ligot. He was an Ilocano. He was the one who was sent here at the time of the strike. When he came here at the time of the strike, there was nothing that he would do to help us, the workers. But he was there at the Bishop plantation. You see, one of the reasons why we didn't win the strike was because this counsel--who was an Ilocano--was sending to the Philippines to get Ilocanos to come and work in the sugar plantations, to get around the strike. That's the reason why there are a lot of Ilocanos here now; it started at that time with him getting Ilocanos to come and to replace us.

EG: How about, did you personally ever see this counsel, Ligot?

PP: Ligot was there in Honolulu, and he never came here to Kauai. He was not in the habit of going around and visiting plantation workers outside of Honolulu. So whenever he had something that he had to tell us, he made up notices and they were sent to us here.

EG: You know, you were saying the other day that when you went into the strike camp you had an amount of money--I think it was about \$600--when the strike began.

PP: When the strike began I think I was the only one who had a small amount of money that I had saved up; around \$600.

EG: Where did the money come from?



PP: I saved it.

EG: Is it because you had a little bit of a better job, the salary was better, and you were able to save that much?

PP: My first job was kalai there, and hanawai. But then, after that, after a short time I was given a little bit of a better job by the luna. I became a ditch-man.

EG: Was the salary better?

PP: Yeah, it was a little bit better than it had been before. Because I kept working and lived kind of a simple life. And I had this little bit of a better job. Because I was thrifty, I was able to save money. So every time we received a salary I was able to put a little bit aside, what I had left over from buying the food that I needed. That's why, at the time of the strike I was able to bring in \$600. Six hundred dollars at that time was a large amount of money.

EG: Before the strike actually happened, what was your plans for that money? To use it to go back to the Philippines?

PP: That was really my intention, to go back with that money. Because I couldn't bring my mother over here to Hawaii. I'm the youngest child in our family. I really didn't want my mother to come here to Hawaii. And so, even before, when I was in the Philippines, I didn't have too much work, even though we had a small piece of land. I used to do some plowing, some small farming, something like that. So I remembered that even before I left the Philippines, I said to my mother, "I'm leaving now, but after three years are over, I'll be back again."

And there was another thing. You know, there's a lot of typhoons that hit the Philippines regularly. And just before I left, there was a typhoon that hit our place and it did a bad job on the house. So I was thinking that I would go to Hawaii in order to collect or get together, save some money that could be used to repair the house. My mother was already quite old and I was sort of hoping that I could help her to live a very peaceful life in a nice house, where they could eat good food. That's really the main reason why I came here in the first place. "If I'm still alive, I'll be back after three years." That's really what I told my mother.

EG: How long did it take you to gather that \$600?

PP: Well, I arrived here and began working on the plantation May 3, 1922. 1924 was the strike. So between 1922 and 1924 I was able to save up \$600.

EG: Did you doubt at all about going on strike, that perhaps you'd ruin your chance of being able to go back to the Philippines if you joined the strikers and not be able to help your mother?

- PP: Ah yeah, that was certainly there. I really had doubts. But there was also this thing about if you didn't join in the strike, there were strikers who had bad intentions towards you; to beat you up or even to kill you.
- EG: You know, we were just talking about this last night also; that thing about if you didn't join in the strike, there are people who are saying that there's a feeling that you would be killed.
- PP: Yeah, that's really true, what you're saying.
- EG: Is there actually somebody who said that, though? That if you don't join in this you're going to be killed?
- PP: No. There was no actual leader of the strikers. But the strikers themselves, because of their desire that all Filipinos would join together in the strike, were saying that if you don't join something's going to happen to you. Because it was commonly said that if we don't all join the strike we're not going to be able to win it.
- EG: What do you think? Were they really serious, that if you don't join the strike they'll kill you?
- PP: I really don't know.
- EG: They didn't actually kill anybody who didn't want to strike?
- PP: No. That's right. And that privilege of going back to the Philippines after three years, I lost that because I was one of the strikers. Once the strike started we didn't go back to the plantation anymore.
- EG: Another thing we were talking about last night is, nobody seems to think that there were any leaders in the strike camp. But when you have a large number of people, somebody has to tell you where to sleep and eat and all of those kinds of things. Who was taking care of that?
- PP: When we were inside of the strike camp we really had leaders. These leaders were the followers of Manlapit. They were the ones who carried through the strike.
- EG: He was really right inside of the strike camp?
- PP: Yes, he was.
- EG: Do you remember their names?
- PP: The only name that I remember is that one they call Amando. He was an Ilocano.
- EG: I'll just read this list of names of people that have been pointed out as being leaders, and then if you recognize any of them just



tell me, huh? Lorenzo Alcorcorn?

[EG reads list. Only those that he recognized or had a comment about are left in.]

EG: Grande Basquez?

PP: Yeah, he was here. He was always coming here. He was the head of strike at this place. He'd come here, he'd go to Hanapepe, he'd go from one strike camp to another.

EG: Florencio Mendoza?

PP: You know, at the time of the strike, there were a lot of people who were not exactly leaders. A companion of Florencio was the one going around making the collections of getting food and things. One Amando, I forget his last name but I was always hearing his name.

EG: Evaristo Acebes?

PP: That Evaristo, he's one of those people that they speak about in the Philippines, as having a certain ability. Yeah, some kind of magical powers. An amulet or some special prayers. He was one of the most famous people involved in the strike, because of this ability that he had. He was really a very fine person, and he wouldn't kill anybody.

EG: Did you ever personally see him?

PP: Oh, sure I did. And sometimes I used to go to his shack. His little shack was right near ours.

EG: Fausto Ceralde?

PP: If I'm not mistaken, he was also one of the leaders of the strike. His name might be Ilarde and not Ceralde. I-L-A-R-D-E.

EG: Were there many people there in the strike camp who had this special ability or some kind of a amulet or some magical powers?

PP: Just that one that we were talking about. Evaristo. According to what people were saying, at the time of the war there in Hanapepe, there was also one striker who had special abilities like that. But I myself never saw him, and I don't know who he was. That just comes from rumor, or the stories they were telling. Anyway, he was a companion during the strike.

EG: [Mrs. Ponce is a medical person also. She massages and is a midwife.] Did you use these abilities that you have to help sick people there in the strike camp?

CP: If anybody inside of the strike camp felt any kind of sickness,

they would say to me, "Please help me, Ning." Had all kinds of sicknesses. Like some people were crippled, they had pains. I helped them. I did it by massaging. And they got better.

EG: Where did you learn these things?

CP: I learned them from my parents.

EG: Even if you were an unmarried woman you still had that talent?

CP: This thing started when I was only 13 years old. I didn't like to take it on myself because I was still a child. But my parents wanted me to do it. My father said to me, "Ning, I think that you yourself have been chosen by the Lord. You can help your own family and help others."

My father was really a medicine man. He was really very skillful. He never went to school, of course. He never went to school like the doctors do. He was really an excellent doctor. When Good Friday would come around, he would say to me, "Ning, we're going to go together."

And I said, "Where?"

"We're going to go up to the cave, up there in the mountains."

I was really scared. "I don't like to go Dad, because it's really scary. I'm afraid."

He would say to me, "Don't be afraid. When we get up there we're going to enter the cave and we won't talk at all." And my father told me, "Don't forget to bring along a candle." He would put six candles in his hand. I was five candles. He would have five candles in one hand, in the spaces between his fingers, and five in the other. When I'd go inside that cave, you know there'd be an awful lot of bats hanging in there. Really dark. And I wouldn't say anything because he told me not to talk. When we would come out of the cave, then on the way back home he would say to me, "You know, Ning, it's a good thing that you came with me and not your older sister. Because she talks an awful lot, and that can't be done in the cave while I'm gathering medicine."

And I'd say to him, "Why is it like that?"

And he'd say, "That's the will of God. This ability that I have to cure, it's a gift given to me by God for other people."

[This is the most common rationale for faith healers all over the Philippines--it's an ability given to a person by God. And if he personally profits from it, takes money from people for his own profit, he loses that gift.]

The next thing was there was an awful lot of sickness in our place,

maybe even like a plague. A lot of---I'm not sure what makes those little scars on people's faces. Is that diptheria or smallpox? Whatever that is. And also cholera. We in our house were not sick at all, but the people in the neighborhood were dropping like flies. We had not smallpox and we had no cholera in our house at all. The neighbors had plenty. There were two or three in each household and there were a number who were dying from it. Then the neighbors would be looking at our household, and some of them would ask me, "Ning, how is it that you don't have any sickness in your house?"

I said, "I don't know. I don't know why it's that way. I don't know what my father has done to prevent the sickness from coming to us."

And they were saying, "Boy, how lucky you are that you haven't gone through this kind of sickness."

And I said to them, "I think it's the power of God, because that's the only thing that can help us."

This person who was talking to me said, "God has come and taken away my brother or my sister."

And I said, "Well, I guess it's the will of God. Your brother or sister has gone on to God."

When I became 14 years old, an unmarried woman, there would be people coming to the house--men and women--who would be asking that I give them massage. [Massage here refers to something like a chiropractor would do. Like if a bone comes out of joint, or there's muscle sprains or strains, and things like that. That's the kind of massage they're talking about.] I was really embarrassed because I was 14 years old and there are people asking for this. I used to cry. My mother pitied the people, and so she would say, "Go ahead and massage them, because they'll give you 2 sentabos." And because my mother told me that, I would go ahead and massage them. Because I was thinking about getting the 2 sentabos. And after that was over, I'd get the 2 sentabos and I'd run down to the store to buy something to eat. I would buy puto maya. [Puto maya is something like rice cake. Another type of rice cake.] That's after they gave me the money.

And then somebody else would come, while I was at the store buying these little rice cakes. And they'd say, "Where is Ining?" They would ask my mother.

My father's name was Sebastian. And he would answer and say, "Ah, she's there at the store. She's having herself a little snack. She'll be right back. She has no money to buy chocolate which goes along with the rice cake. The chocolate is here at our place, so once she buys the rice cake for sure she'll be back here."

I said to my mother, "Why are those people here?"

They would say, "You know, They've come here because my stomach is very painful." This woman was saying this. She's just been married. Maybe it was only about two years since she had been married.

You know, at that time in the Philippines, out in the rural areas, there were no doctors. My mother would say, "You know, it's a good thing if you give a massage to this woman who has come, Bibing. Go ahead, you give here the massage because I have things to do."

I'd say, "No, you do it, Ma."

And my mother would say, "No, no. I'm here cooking rice. Now you go ahead and do that."

So I massaged her. And while I was giving her a massage, I realized that she was conceiving. I said to her, "You know why you're feeling pain in your stomach? It's because you're pregnant."

She said, "Is that the way it is? Are you sure?"

I said, "Yeah, really. You wait about five months after I finish massaging you this time, and then come back here and I'll check you again."

Just around five months had passed, not yet five months, and she came back for a check-up. And that's how I really began being a hilot--massager's not a good word for it. Sort of like a folk doctor--up until now.

You know, by the grace of God I was able to help a lot of women, and nothing ever happened to them while they were delivering children. You know, there's a number of doctors who really don't believe in this kind of massaging. They're afraid that the child will be crushed inside of the womb if there's this kind of massaging.

END OF SIDE TWO

SIDE ONE: Tape No. 5-25-1-78 TR

CP: Mr. Huna was the boss of the pineapple before, and I think he's dead now.

GG: Do you remember what years you worked at the pineapple? Before the war or after the war?

CP: 1927, I work pineapple.

GG: For how long?

CP: Nine, eh? Nine year, Daddy?

PP: About six, seven years, I think. The company went bankrupt because they had a whole series of labor strikes. They couldn't afford to pay the salaries that the workers were asking for.

CP: "Ining, don't work, because we're going to be out on strike."

EG: As you look back, the 50 years or so since the strike of 1924, how do you look at it now? Was it a good thing, or what? What are your own feelings about it?

CP: Really, their purpose was to get a higher salary. But they weren't able to win because the company was able to bring in scabs. They got Ilocanos to work, who would not go out on strike. I'm trying to think of the name of one of the leaders who kept giving talks at that time. This person, this leader kept saying, "Don't go out on strike because it's a terrible thing to be out on strike. Very difficult."

While even the workers were on strike there were some who would say, "Gee, maybe it's better if we just go back to the plantation."

EG: But how do you look at the whole thing?

CP: Well, you know, maybe it's okay. Because by the grace of God, the mercy of God, we're still alive. We were able to arrive at the place at the time that we're at now. There were many people at the time of the strike who were very sad because they had children, they weren't able to take care of them, to give them nourishment. For people who had eight and seven children, the salary was very low. I really worked very hard so that my children would be able to live.

GG: Did you work full time, or seasonal, or part-time [at the cannery]?

CP: Part-time, I no work because I take care of my children. I wash the clothes. Bumbai, my children, he grow up because I teach, eh, again. And, you know, "You fella know different Mama. So you fella, you, you cook; you, you wash; you, you clean house." That's why, my kids, all he know.

EG: Was this house here way before?

PP: 1926, we were there in Kapaa, and that was after the strike.

CP: That was the year that I gave birth to Mary.

PP: Houses were very cheap before.

CP: Cheap, eh, the house. But not now.

PP: In 1930, I bought this piece of land. It's one acre. 1940, when the war was over, that's when this house was built.

CP: And I really have to thank God for all the difficult things that I've gone through. This is now our own house.

PP: One acre, you know, I buy, \$400 only. Cheap.

CP: Father, now somebody like buy this one, \$75,000. I no sell because....

PP: \$75,000 he like buy, because near the school, near to the church. Near to the Kapaa town. That's why, my kids, they grew up over here. Good.

CP: You know, I really have to thank God that my kids don't have any kids who are really naughty, who are bad in any way. I'm grateful for that. He no tell you, "Shut up," or , "Oh Mama, you da kine," no. I get my boy over here, oh, he respect me. Whatever it was that my parents taught me, that's what I passed on to my own children. For instance, I made a promise to serve my own parents until they died. I took care of them. And now our children also take care of us. In the old days, if you were corrected by your parents, you just took it, you didn't talk back to them. It's a big difference between before and the way the children are today. Walay batasan. [One of the worst expressions in Visayan is "Walay batasan." Literally, it means someone who has no character. But it means it reflects back on your family and on everybody. It means that you have no bringing up.] The thing that's important is knowing how to respect the elders. And that's one of the things we feel they're lacking in the young people today.

Every Sunday, Father, I pray this one, for bless the people. It's really a big difference, tremendous difference, between before and now.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 5-42-2-78 TR1 and TR2

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Pedro (PP) and Crescencia (CP) Ponce

December 7, 1978

Kapaa, Kauai

BY: Ed Gerlock (EG) and Gael Gouveia (GG)

GG: This is an interview with the Ponces, in their home in Kapaa. The date is December 7, 1978. The interviewer is Ed Gerlock.

EG: It seems like when we interviewed you the last time, we didn't quite get exactly what the name of the boat was that you sailed on, from the Philippines coming here to Hawaii. What was the name of the boat again?

PP: From Manila to Hong Kong, we were on the boat called the President Lincoln. We were in Hong Kong for one day, and then we sailed on the same ship for Yokohama. We stayed two days in Yokohama. And in Yokohama, we changed to another boat. Taiyo-maru is the name of the ship; it's a Japanese ship. And that's the boat we went on, from Yokohama to Honolulu.

EG: And what year was that?

PP: 1922.

EG: When you came here did you know how to speak English?

PP: Well, I knew a little bit. I was able to go to school while I was still in the Philippines; up until the third grade.

I arrived in Hanamaulu on May 1, and I began working on May 3 [1922]. And because most of my companions were Japanese, then we learned how to speak in some kind of an English; that we could understand one another. If my companions were Filipino, however, then I used Filipino.

EG: When the strike went on, in 1924, what were the workers asking for?

PP: When we went on strike in 1924--and I was included in the strike--we asked for \$2 a day, instead of \$1.

EG: And there was nothing else?



PP: No, there was nothing else that we asked for. Just asking for \$2 a day. But the plantations really wouldn't give \$2 a day. And what really ruined our strike was that the Commissioner of Labor appointed at that time, Cayetano Ligot, was bringing in Ilocanos from the northern part of Luzon to replace the strikers. That's what really broke our strike.

EG: When Manlapit used to speak, what language did he use?

PP: He used English.

EG: The people, were they able to understand what he was saying?

PP: He sort of used English, and he also used Filipino--Tagalog--so that people could understand. And the Filipinos generally understood. Manlapit himself was a Tagalog, eh.

EG: What did he talk about when he gave these talks?

PP: He talked about the strike coming up, and how we have to be united together, and how we need more money to be able to live decently. But the plantations really wouldn't give the money, because they kept bringing in Ilocanos from the Philippines.

EG: How about Manlapit, as far as you're personally concerned, what kind of a person was he?

PP: For me, he was a very fine man. His purpose really was to help the poor, to help the workers on the plantations. His purpose really was to help us so that we could have a better salary, to be able to better support our families.

EG: You yourself, were you able to hear some of the talks that Manlapit himself gave?

PP: Yeah, because here in Kauai where we were on strike, he came here fairly often.

EG: More or less, how many times do you think you heard his voice?

PP: Here in Kapaa, he spoke once. He also spoke there at the Hanamaulu Store.

EG: When you say that you were building strikers' camp or some kind of houses there on the beach, where did you get the materials to build the houses?

PP: Everybody was responsible for putting up their own shelter. And so we went to the different stores and we asked for---in those days, they had wooden boxes. And materials that we could find; just scraps to put together some kind of a house.

EG: How long did it take you to put up one of these kind of houses?



PP: Some of those little houses, sometimes it only took us a day to put up something like that.

EG: How many were you that put up one of these kinds of houses or shacks?

PP: The one that I was living in, we were only two.

EG: So it was something like the food; each group was responsible?

PP: Yeah, responsible for putting up its own house. Yeah, it was something like that. But like with the food, when the men went around for the collection, we would put it in one particular place. And so people who needed it could go to that place and get it.

EG: Manong, according to what you were saying, there were outside agitators who came in and tried to break the strike?

PP: Yeah. These were people who we suspect were given a salary or paid off by the plantations. The plantation really intended to break the strike, and so they paid off different people who would infiltrate and come into the strike camp in order to try and break it. Their purpose really was to come in and to make trouble, so that it would cause a lot of trouble, and the strike would be broken as a result.

EG: Were you one of the people who took turns standing guard at the strike camp?

PP: Yeah, sometimes I did. We were a lot of strikers, so we took turns. And every night, there would be four or five of us on duty.

EG: Who was the one who would make that decision about who was supposed to be on duty, to watch over the strike camp?

PP: It was our leaders who made that decision.

EG: Who were the leaders?

PP: Callarde, Armando.

EG: And you, how many times were you on guard?

PP: Twice. The ones who were mostly on duty guarding the camp were Filipinos who were strong or brave, or people who were not afraid at all. Mostly young people.

EG: Is it not true, according to your own story, that there was one night when you caught two Filipinos who wanted to burn down the rice mill?

PP: Yes, we did. But I myself was not on duty that night guarding. Right there, at the strike camp, we had a rice mill. And there was

a lot of materials that go with the rice mill; like the rice hulls. And so we were very careful so that there wouldn't be any kind of a fire. We were afraid because if the place did burn down, of course they would blame it on the strikers.

EG: The guy that you caught, was he a Filipino?

PP: Yes. But I forget his name. When we caught 'em, we put 'em inside the "jail". We imprisoned him in one of the rooms there at the strike camp. He was imprisoned in that room until morning. There was only one man. And around 7 o'clock, the police came and they wanted to get him. But we wouldn't turn him over to the police. That was 7 o'clock in the morning, and it was still little bit dark. Later, at 6 o'clock [at night], the chief of police came and he wanted to get the man that we had caught. Before we turned him over, we wanted to investigate him ourselves; to find out why he had been doing, who had sent him, and why he was there. After we finished that, we turned him over to the police.

EG: You, yourself, you saw this man?

PP: Yes, I did. The other strikers, because you know how it can be sometimes with Filipinos. We had been a long time there at the strike camp. They wanted to beat him up. I stopped them from doing that because there's no reason to beat him up. That's why nothing really happened to him. We were three, who were speaking against doing anything to this man.

EG: Do you know the names of your companions?

PP: ....They're already dead. I forgot his name.

EG: Whatever happened to this guy who you caught, who was trying to burn down the rice mill?

PP: We kept him locked up in the room. And then, in the morning, the police came for him. Ai, it was 6 o'clock in the morning that they turned him over to the police.

EG: But what happened to him? Did he go to jail, or did the police keep him in custody for a long time?

PP: I don't know. I think he was just let go, because after all, he was from the plantation. You have to understand that the way it was here before, it was the plantations that ran the government. The plantations were above the government. So I think they just let him go, because after all, it was the plantations that determined everything.

EG: When the police came, what language did you use to discuss with them?

PP: We have to use English, of course. Some were Hawaiians, some were haole, some Portuguese.

EG: Were there any other incidents that happened like that, in the strike camp?

PP: There was another incident that happened. There was the policeman who came. The police was from the government. He entered into the strike camp; he was riding a horse. This little short guard that we had, who was probably a Muslim from Mindanao, he was the guard at night, at that time when the policeman came in on horseback.

EG: The policeman was all alone when he entered?

PP: Yes, he was all alone. We became aware of the whole thing when we heard a revolver go off. We ran out there, alongside the sea. Our little guard there took a shot at 'em. And the only thing that he hit was the hat of the policeman on horseback.

EG: So the guy who was on horseback was a policeman?

PP: Yeah, that's right. He was a policeman. That's what made it so difficult, when we were on strike before. Because our enemies were not only the plantations, but the police themselves. You see what happened in Hanapepe, when all the strikers were killed, who were they fighting against, if not the police?

EG: So what you're saying is that the plantation and the police were united together?

PP: Yes, that's right.

EG: So, to get back to the story about the man with the hat, his hat was hit and so he ran away?

PP: Yeah, that's right. He just got on, he continued on his horse and went away.

EG: He didn't return?

PP: No, he didn't. But it was lucky and nothing else happened. That's all there was to the incident.

EG: What do you think was the purpose? What do you think he was doing there, that policeman who came riding in on the horse?

PP: Their purpose always was to break our strike.

EG: Was he the chief of police, or was he just an ordinary policeman?

PP: I don't know if he was the chief of police or if he was just an ordinary policeman.

EG: Was he a Filipino?

PP: No, he wasn't. He was a Hawaiian.

EG: This collection that you were talking about, of getting donations for the strikers, was that something that was carried on every day? Or was it at certain times?

PP: That was every day. Because everyday you eat three times, no? Sometimes only two times. And there were a lot of strikers, so it required quite a large collection to keep the strikers alive. If you were able to pick up one sack of rice, that wouldn't be enough to feed all the strikers for one day.

EG: But you went to different plantations?

PP: The only plantation that we could really go inside of legally was Kilauea. Because there was no one that was on strike on that plantation. They were the ones that kept the strike going. We were able to go to Puhi and to also collect for the strikers.

EG: The people who made the collection, were they the same people or were they different at different time?

PP: They were different at different times.

EG: Manong, we're a little bit confused because---what was the distribution system for this? For instance, you collect rice or fish or whatever it was; how would you give it out to the strikers?

PP: We had one special room where we put everything that was collected. The people who were on strike would go to that room and they would ask for whatever it was that they needed; like rice or fish.

EG: Any time? Or was there a special day or a special hour when you went to that place?

PP: Sometimes it was everyday you could go there. But other times it was only at special times. That was a special room that was made the office for distribution of food.

EG: Say for instance, I am a family man and I have 10 children. And you, you're not even married. How would we go to the office and get enough food for my 10 children, but you only need enough for one? Did they have some kind of a list or something?

PP: The people were given containers for rice, and so the number of people that you had in the family, that's how many containers you had. And so, when you went to get your rice, if you were a husband and a wife, and you had three children, then you'd have five cans. And you were able to get rice to take care of your whole family.

EG: Was that every day?

PP: Yes. It was everyday if there was enough rice. If not, then it depended on how much rice there was.

EG: Manong, are you saying that there were times when the strikers also went hungry?

PP: Yes indeed. There were times when the strikers went hungry. Because there was no collection. But we who went out collecting, we just turned in everything that we received. Bananas, sweet potato, whatever it was that people gave us; we turned it in.

EG: Manong, if you don't mind, I'm going to ask you a very frank question, because there are some people who are saying that the collectors gave some of the things for the good of all the strikers, but there were also things that they put into their own pocket. Do you think that that's true?

PP: You know, strikers are no different than any kinds of people. As far as I know, we turned in everything that we had. But it's not beyond belief that there were also strikers who took care of their own, or helped themselves at the time of the strike.

EG: Well, for instance, Manong, if I were a fisherman and I went out, of course, I would get good fish and lousy fish. When I came back to the shore, naturally, I would give the good fish to my good friends and relatives, and I'd give the lousy fish to people that I wasn't so close to. I mean, that would seem natural.

PP: Yeah, well, I guess that's the way it was. There were people who took care of their relatives and their friends, because not everybody in the strike camp even knew one another. So people were willing to help the common good, but naturally, they were worried about their own families too.

EG: How about money?

PP: If the collectors went out and they were given money, what they did with the money was they gave it to the strike leader. It was up to the strike leader; if there was no more rice and he had money, then he would go out and buy rice.

EG: How about cooking? Who did the cooking?

PP: Well, each group took care of its own cooking.

EG: But was it usually the women?

PP: Yeah, usually it was the women who took care of the cooking.

EG: Didn't you say, the last time we were talking, that there was one person who owned a car?

PP: Yes, there was. It was my kompadre, my good friend who owned it.

EG: Wasn't it a taxi?

PP: Yes, that's right; it was a taxi. We had no other car but that one. And because he was our friend, usually he was around the strike area in case we needed transportation quickly.

EG: What was his name?

PP: His name was Clemente Quijano.

EG: How many taxis did he have?

PP: He only had one. It was the only car at that time, in Kapaa.

EG: Was he also a worker at the plantation, or was he a full time taxi driver?

PP: That was all that he did; he drove the taxi. He helped us, but we also tried to help him. For example, if there was money that came into the collection, then we would share some of it with him, so that he could buy gasoline and keep himself alive also.

EG: When you went into jail, how many were you inside?

PP: I think maybe we were around 100.

EG: You were taken to jail by the police. What kind of police were those?

PP: We were rounded up by the police maybe around 3 o'clock in the morning. We were asleep in our small houses there on the beach, in the strike camp, and then the police came in. And they had their guns right in our faces. They told us to get up and to change. They brought along with them, a big truck. We were all taken in the truck. And those police, they were government police. They left the women behind and they took the men. It didn't make any difference if they were married or single; as long as they were men, they took them along.

So I stayed there in the jail for one night. And the next day I was released. And there was a Japanese friend of mine who needed workers; and so he took me on. So the very next day, I was taken out of jail.

EG: When you were in the Hee Fat Building, is there a telephone in that building?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

PP: No. At the time of the strike there was no telephone in the Hee Fat Building.



EG: According to what others were saying, at the time of the trouble there in Hanapepe, they called from Hanapepe to Kapaa, and told them about what had happened and how many strikers were killed.

PP: While there was no telephone in the Hee Fat Building, there were telephones in the other places. For instance, in some of the stores.

EG: Who was the owner of the Hee Fat Building at that time?

PP: It was a Chinese. He was alive at that time. He was not a very old man. He was the only wealthy person here at that time.

EG: Where did this money come from?

PP: You know how it is with the Chinese; they always have money. But at that time, right near the strike camp that we were, there was large rice fields. And Hee Fat was the owner of those rice fields. That was one of the places where he got his money from. So he put up that big building. And then, in back of it he also had this rice mill. That why we were watching over that rice mill also; so that it wouldn't burn or we wouldn't get blamed for it. He was the wealthy person there at that time. He had a lot of land.

EG: Is it not true that you also were working before, planting coconuts? Did you have a salary for that?

PP: Of course I had a salary for planting coconuts. That was the work that we were doing while we were on strike, so that we could make a little bit of money also. At that time, we were given a dollar and a quarter [\$1.25] a day for planting coconuts.

EG: Who was giving you this salary?

PP: The name of the man was Crabbe. He was the owner of the coconut grove. The real owner was the person who also owns Niihau, by the name of Robinson. He has a lot of coconut plantations and he is very wealthy. Crabbe was married to the child of Robinson, and so he was the one who was in charge of like the planting of the coconuts. He was like a manager for Robinson. It's that place where you see the hotels are now [near what is called the Coconut Plantation or the Market Place; Lihue side of Waipouli]. We're the ones who planted the coconuts there. There were eight of us working there, planting those coconuts.

EG: When you went into the jail, was the strike, for all practical purposes, over at that time?

PP: No, it wasn't over yet. When people started being released from the jail, their wives were still there at the strike camp. They went back to get their wives. And for all practical purposes, that was the end of the strike for us.

EG: Do you think that was the intention of the police when they arrested

you; was to break the strike?

PP: Sure. What else would it be? Those were hard times.

EG: You, Mrs. Ponce, I also would like to ask you some questions. You said when you came here from the Philippines, that your uncle was your companion on the boat. Is that true?

CP: Yes.

EG: When you arrived here in Kauai, what plantation were you assigned to?

CP: Kealia.

EG: And then, your uncle was also your companion when you went there?

CP: Yes, of course. I went to live there with my uncle, because he was married. He already had a wife, and so I stayed with them. They were married already in the Philippines, and so they rode together on the ship. And I was their companion. They had no children yet. They used to call me their child. When we got to the plantation--Filemon was the name of my uncle, his first name--he asked me if I wanted to work.

I said, "I will work if there is work."

He said, "Why don't you just take in wash. Wash clothes, because the work is very heavy for women there in the sugar cane fields." That's how we began to wash clothes. We took in wash but the salary was very low. Because for one person, for one month, they would pay you \$2.50. It was really very tiresome kind of work, and the water here was kind of cold. Not like in the Philippines, where it was warm.

That's why I used to cry a lot. I wanted to come so much here to Hawaii, and it turns out to be a very bitter kind of place. The work was very hard. I should have stayed back in the Philippines. Well, we just have to suffer because that is our lot in life. And we are here in Hawaii now. And we ourselves had very little in the way of clothes. And so once we began washing clothes, we were paid off with money, then we went to Kapaa to buy clothes for ourselves. It was a lot better before because cloth was very cheap. So we went into Kapaa, and we could buy three pieces that could be used for making dresses; and that was only \$1. So when we came home, we just continued sewing; making clothes for ourselves, because we knew how to make our own clothes.

My companion's name was Marsella. And she was saying to me, "Maybe it'd be better if we just got married."

I told her to "Shut up," because very tiresome to get married.



Marsella said, "Well, I'm going to get married anyway."

So I said, "Sure, go ahead. If you like, you go ahead. But I'm not going to get married. I'm just going to make a little bit of money here, and then I'm going to go back to the Philippines."

There's another relative of mine who came to me and said, "You know, it would be better if we just go and work in the plantation. The money is better there."

We got a job in the plantation, and our job was to take off the dead leaves of the sugar plant, and to wrap them up in bundles. I found the work very heavy, and I thought to myself, "I think I'll just go back to Kapaa." When I went back to Kapaa, that's where I saw my [future] husband. There I was, coming back to Kapaa, and I was carrying with me my mat--the woven mat that people sleep on in the Philippines. I looked somebody---real country girl. I was carrying all the things that I owned. You know, I probably looked like some woman who comes from the mountains in the Philippines. And that's really funny because really, I come from the city in the Philippines. I didn't care what they said about me anyway, I was going to come back to Kapaa. "I'm not going back to that plantation, no matter what happens." There weren't any cars to ride in at that time, so I had to just walk.

EG: That uncle that you were staying with at the time of the strike, did he also strike?

CP: No. He was plantation police; he used to watch alongside the road, and so he didn't join in the strike. The strike people couldn't go inside of the plantation because there were police there.

EG: What plantation was that?

CP: That was here in Kealia. They were asking me where I was going. I was really going to the house of my sister. Because I had a sister here. Come to think of it, it was the opposite. It was Pedring [her present husband] who came to get me, to take me to the home of my sister--which was inside of the strike camp, at that time. When I looked at the picture of the husband of my sister, I realized that this man who had come to get me was not my brother-in-law. So I was hesitant to go with him. And I won't go with this strange man because I don't know him.

So when Pedring went back to see my sister, he said that he had seen her sister. But when she looked at the picture and knew that he wasn't the husband, she wouldn't come with him. "She's a very nice woman but she wouldn't come with me."

And there was this other guy who was from the Philippines, from Pampanga. He also wanted to court me. But I didn't like him because we didn't speak the same language; we couldn't understand

each other. I told him that he should look for somebody else that he can talk to, and they can understand each other. He's the one who offered to take me to Kapaa, to meet my sister.

My sister was a little bit upset that I went with this man--this guy from Pampanga who was courting me--because he had some kind of authority inside of the plantation. And were he to enter into the strike camp, they would have got a hold of him and tied him up.

EG: I wanted to ask you about that man, that Pampangan who was courting you; his name was Abe, no? Was he also included in the strike in any way?

CP: No, he wasn't included.

EG: [They keep using the word boto-boto. I don't know what the word means. It's not Visayan, at least the way they're using it. So I asked them what it means.]

PP: It means that he was some kind of an official of the plantation. He was being given a salary by plantation officials. I don't know exactly what he did but obviously, he couldn't be included with the strikers because he was on the other side.

CP: My sister was of the opinion that I should be interested in this guy Abe, even though he didn't speak the same language. But he at least had some kind of a high position, as contrasted with my own [future] husband, who my sister thought was a very sickly person and probably had not much of a future because he was just another one of the strikers.

[And she answers by saying,] "Maria santisima" "Holy Mary, I'm not interested in that man."

My husband now, at that time, had beriberi of some kind.

EG: About this man Abe who was courting you, what was his work; because I still don't understand boto-boto.

PP: In some way, he was some kind of---he received a salary from the plantation, and he had something to do with being a policeman.

CP: There was an old woman who was a friend of my sister and myself, and we respected her very much. And she said that she would no longer come to our house unless I took seriously the proposal of Abe to marry me. I told this old woman that I would not marry him in any way, under any condition. But if she liked him so much, and she liked this character, why didn't she marry him? She didn't answer me.

My uncle was asking me if I wouldn't come back to his house in Kealia, to stay with him. And I said, "No, I don't think I'm going

to go back to Kealia anymore. I think I'm just going to stay with my sister in the strike camp."

At the time of the strike it was really very difficult; not only for the men, but the women especially were crying when the men were arrested.

There was one time, I had a little bit of money saved up, and a friend of mine came to me and said, "Ning, please help me. Let me buy some tobacco."

I asked her how much the tobacco was. She said--it's raw kind of tobacco, like twisted--and she said it was 10 cents. I looked at my money, and then I went to the store. I bought three of those tobaccos for her because she was hungry, and because the tobacco gave her a feeling of satisfaction. And so she never forgot me, up until the time she died, because of that favor I did for her. Even if you don't have anything to eat, as long as you have some tobacco you can keep going.

EG: Were you all Visayans inside of the strike camp?

PP: Yeah, mostly all of us were Visayans. Usually, that was even the language we were using. There were very few Ilocanos [on the plantation] at that time. There were a few Tagalogs, but only very few.

EG: And how much was your salary at that time?

PP: It was 10 cents an hour. And so, for 10 hours work in one day, that was \$1 salary.

EG: [And now we begin talking about Cayetano Ligot, the commissioner who was sent from Manila here to Hawaii.]

PP: But by the time he arrived here, he had already co-opted by the plantation owners and was in some way estranged from the strikers who were his fellow Filipinos. We have no way of knowing whether he received a salary from the plantation or not. But it's clear, from the time he arrived here, that he was already on the side of the plantations and not of the strikers. That's really one of the main reasons why the strike was not successful; because of Ligot. His way of solving the problem was to get Ilocanos to come from the Philippines, to replace the strikers. For example, if there was one place that had 50 Visayans on strike, he would order 100 Ilocanos to come from the Philippines to replace them. That was so the plantation would not have a hard time and be lacking labor. There's no way of knowing whether he received compensation from the plantation owners, but it just looked very suspicious. When the strike was over, it wasn't a long time after that that he went back to the Philippines. He was Ilocano himself.

When I first arrived in 1922, there was a commissioner who was

already here, by the name of [Francisco] Varona. He was really very fine man. Varona was his name, and he was a very good commissioner. Varona probably was appointed here in 1921. He was before Ligot. Ligot came in 1924. Varona was a man who was very much concerned about Filipino plantation workers and their situation. For instance, if workers were living in sub-human conditions; if the house was very poor, Varona would go there to the house and say that they would do something about getting better housing conditions for the workers.

EG: Where was he from in the Philippines?

PP: I don't really know, but maybe from Manila. I think maybe he was a Tagalog. He was really on the side of the plantation workers. We had decent housing, and he was really concerned about the situation of the workers.

EG: When you were still back in the Philippines, Mrs. Ponce, your father was a medicine man, as you yourself are at the present time. According to your story, like on Good Friday, he would go to the caves. We're really interested in like what kind of medicine would you be gathering up there in the caves, on Good Friday, in the Philippines?

CP: Usually roots. Roots of the trees was what my father was gathering. Roots from plants. He would gather up all different roots from plants and trees and he would bring them home and separate them, and then label them. And so, if somebody came to our house with some certain kind of sickness, he would know what root to use. He would sometimes apply it to the outside of the body; sometimes he would be give it to be drunk--boiled with water and to be drunk.

EG: And how about the candles you were saying he put in his hand?

CP: Yeah, he would put them in the spaces between the fingers and they wouldn't blow out; 1, 2, 3, 4. Eight all together, in two hands. When we would go inside of the cave, he would say to me, "Day, no matter what you see inside of this cave, don't make noise, eh." I tell you, Father, I was really afraid because there were pythons inside of it. There were all kind of animals inside of there. We would be picking up not only different roots, but also grasses. He would bring them home and wash them off, and clearly label them so that he would have medicines available for any kind of sickness.

There was a time, maybe around 1912, when there was an epidemic in our place in the Philippines, around Cebu. The epidemic was....I think diptheria. Whatever it is that leaves these little scars all over your face. Diptheria or smallpox. There were neighbors on both sides of us who died, and were laid flat by the sickness. But in our house, no one got sick. No one in our house got this diptheria, no one got cholera. Many of the houses were quarantined off so that they wouldn't expose other people to the sickness.

During this epidemic my father would be sometimes downstairs, and he would be burning weeds or grasses that would cause a lot of smoke. The smell was very sweet, very nice smelling. No one in our house got sick. Not my father or mother, or any of the children. And the weeds that he was burning, he said, "Don't worry about it because it won't cause anyone to be poisoned or to become sickly, but it's some kind of a medicine against the epidemic." We were five brothers and sisters in our family and no one got sick.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 5-42-2-78 TR2; SIDE ONE

CP: When everything subsided people would come around and would ask my father--his name was Sebastian--they would say, "Manong Sebastian, why is it that no one in your house gets sick?"

My father would just answer, "You know, by the mercy of God, no one in our house got sick. Our prayers were heard."

My father was really very religious [Catholic]. My father was a very deeply religious man. He would go to church everyday. Sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the afternoon, and he said the rosary early in the morning. And the same is true of my mother. They would say the rosary at dawn.

Anybody who would come to him to be treated for a sickness, he would cure them. The chief of police in our place came to my father, and he had already received the last sacraments. [Meaning, the church was considering him to be on his way out. He was dying.] And he came to my father, and my father gave him some of the medicine made out of the roots, and he got better. My father really had power that came from God. And he himself never had any kind of sickness.

He would tell me every Sunday, "Ning, why don't you go down to the store there and buy some rice cakes that we can eat. Don't buy chocolate because we have chocolate here at home. [Chocolate, meaning like cocoa.]

I would say to him, "No, why don't we get somebody else, one of the other kids, to go down and buy the stuff because I'd like to go to church with you also." I would go to church with him. He would receive Holy Communion, and I would also.

So one Sunday like that, after receiving the Holy Communion at the altar rail, I came back to my seat. And I looked and my father didn't come back. He just stayed up there. He didn't stand up after receiving Communion. And so we went up there to get him. The priest came down and the priest said, "Your father has died."



I was hugging him and beginning to cry. I couldn't say anything. The priest said to me, "Don't cry because your father's death is a very beautiful one. His spirit has gone to God," according to the priest. We didn't even know that he was sick, but when the priest came down to give him Holy Communion and he said the words, "the Body of Christ," the spirit of my father went to God. Everyone was telling me not to cry because it was such a beautiful death. Never sick a day in his life and he died in the church.

The same with my mother. It just happened one day, I was still in the Philippines, and my mother told me to walk not too far from the house, to harvest some of the rice that was there. But not too far from the house. I and three of my brothers or sisters went there to cut the rice because it was all ready for the harvest. There was an old man who came walking by and he said, "Hey, you'd better get going home."

And we said, "Why?"

He said, "Because your mother has died."

I said to him, "Why are you talking like that? What has my mother done against you that you should speak in that way? The reason why we're here in the first place is because my mother has sent us down here to harvest this rice."

He said, "This child doesn't believe me, but go. Go home. When you get home, you'll see that your mother is no longer there."

I picked up the rice and started running. And by the time I got to the house, I wasn't carrying any more rice. I ran in and I said to my father, "How come Ma is all wet?" And my father said that he threw water on her because he couldn't rouse her. It looked like some kind of a heart attack that she had.

He said, "Her mouth was full of blood and I couldn't rouse her. And so I threw water on her, hoping that might bring her around."

EG: How old were you at that time, Mrs. Ponce?

CP: I was 16 years old.

EG: You were saying that you were working in a cannery here in Hawaii. What year was that?

CP: 1925. Yeah. I wasn't married yet. I was still being courted by my husband.

PP: She worked there at the cannery until they went bankrupt. And there was another cannery near here, up above; and she began working there too.

EG: So all together, how many years did you work in the cannery?

CP: Nine years. Four years in one and five years in the other. And after that, I had a small child and there was no one to stay home with the child. And so I quit. So I just stayed home while my children were growing up. And, you know, we have to be really grateful to God that we have arrived at this age.

PP: You know, this wife of mine, that's a very long story about this power that she has from God to heal people. You can't believe the number of people that she has been able to help. From the time that we were married up until the present time, I myself am quite surprised at the power that she has to be able to help people in the way of healing. Especially people who are conceiving. Sometimes there are children who are growing in the womb and they're crooked. Sometimes it happens that the child dies inside of the womb. Or for example, if somebody gets a sprain or gets crippled, she's able to help them. It happened once, there was a horse that was crippled. And she, by massaging it, was able to get the horse running again. The horse just stood up and ran away. I'm really surprised at how much she knows. Or for example, even women who want to have children and can't conceive; she's been able to help them also. After how many months, they become pregnant. Among Filipinos, this woman is known all over Kauai for her healing ability. And incidentally, it seems to be true.

I sometimes get a little bit upset because there are people here almost every day--morning, noon and night--looking for some kind of healing from her. You know, these days, when she's an older woman, and it's just too much to have people here all the time.

And secondly, there are hospitals where they can go to. For example, there are sometimes people who go crazy. And she's able to help them. For example, there was one young unmarried woman who came here. She was from Kalaheo. She was in a mental hospital. But her parents--because they had heard about my wife--asked permission from the doctor to have her come here to see her. They were given the notice to have her taken back to the mental hospital at Kaneohe. The mother of the child pleaded with the doctor that before they go to what they call the "crazy house" in Kaneohe, if she could be taken to my wife and be massaged. That there might still be some hope. The doctor said, "Okay. But if it doesn't work, you have to take her to the crazy house at Kaneohe. Because it's dangerous for crazy people to be walking around; they can kill people. That's how she was brought here to the house. And they had put her inside some kind of sack to keep her....[like a strait-jacket, I think] The mother and two men came with her, and she was like in an army bag. When we came home they were already here. And of course, all the neighbors were looking and wondering what was going on because the child was shouting. My wife had her lay down on the bed, and of course, she wasn't moving, nor shouting, nor doing anything. She gave her a small handkerchief to hold in her hands and then she began to massage her. The young girl was accustomed to punching the mother and the men who had come with

her. And that's why they put her inside of the sack in the first place. I asked the mother, "Why didn't you just take the girl to the doctor? You know, my wife is not a doctor, and maybe that's what she needs."

The mother answered, "We're coming from the doctor, and we have begged him that if it's possible we could just come here to see your wife, if there's something that can be done."

And she was able to help the child. The child stayed there at the house for one week, and she massaged her and talked with her. And after that, she was okay.

CP: I gave her, the small handkerchief that she was holding in her hand when she left. I said, "You come back to see me, and you return this handkerchief to me when you come back."

And she said, "Yes." After a short time, she came back again and returned the handkerchief.

PP: And that's why I really believe that my wife, she's able to help people who have physical sicknesses and hard times. But I sometimes try and tell people not to come here because it's just too much.

Even to other islands; for instance, she has been given tickets to go to Honolulu to massage and give medicine to sick people there.

Like before, when Dr. Kuhns was still alive here in Kauai, he was the one who used to tell people--especially women who were having difficulties in their birth--to call on my wife to help them. Almost all the Filipinos here before would never go to the hospital to have their children but they would have them at home. They would call Dr. Kuhns and Dr. Kuhns would call my wife. Or they would just call my wife and she would go and help them. The doctor would say, "Mrs. Ponce can really help you. She's better to have by your side than a nurse." That's why, sometimes it would be like 1 o'clock in the morning; there would be people coming here to the house asking for help. Any hour of the day or night, people would come here looking for help.

EG: How about among your own children; since your father had this ability and he seems to have passed it on to you, are there any of your children to whom you will be passing this ability to cure people on to?

PP: None of the children have it. There's no one to follow her.

CP: My two daughters were here at that time, when that crazy girl was brought by her mother and by those men. And she really was afraid. She panicked. She said, "Ma, there's a crazy woman who has been brought to the house." I told her not to talk like that.



While that girl was here in the house and I was massaging her and talking with her, she talked perfectly normal to me; unlike the way she had come. She said that she felt good now, after the massage. I told this girl and when she went home, that she should take a pan of water, she should put some ti leaves into it and put it underneath her bed and leave it there for three days. And after three days, to throw it out. You know, that girl is married now, and has children. Her name is....I had forgotten her. She works there in Lihue. I was someplace--I forget where--and the girl came up behind me and threw her arms around me and said, "How are you?" And I got frightened because I didn't remember who the girl was. She said, "Don't you remember me? I'm Corey, the girl that you cured."

"Ai, Mary Most Holy, I forgot." She was about 15 years old when she was brought to the house. Now she was married and she had a child. She invited me to come to her house to visit. But I'm not the type of person who goes from house to house. I'm either in the church, in the house, or by the sea.

PP: In my own experience, there have been three people who came here to the house and were cured. The doctor was all prepared to send them to the crazy house because there was no hope for them. For instance, there was a child who had a lot of accidents. He broke his leg and his arm, and then he came there to her and she cured him.

Even our grandchild. You know how the children are today. They like to ride on motorcycles and things. He was riding a motorcycle up there in the mountains. He fell off the motorcycle and was unable to walk. That's why I scolded him also, because it's dangerous to ride on a motorcycle.

My wife was able to give him medicine. For instance....I myself helped in making the medicine. It was made from that yellow ginger. After three days he was better, and climbed back up on the motorcycle. And he doesn't limp very much either. He's back in school.

END OF INTERVIEW

# **The 1924 Filipino Strike on Kauai**

## **Volume I**

**ETHNIC STUDIES ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

**Ethnic Studies Program  
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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